

## 4-H Out-of-School Programs

### **Situation:**

Young adults are better prepared to acquire and retain employment, live on their own, raise a family, and participate in their community when they learn and practice basic skills through 4-H Youth Development. These skills include effective communication, goal setting, decision making, problem solving, leadership and conflict resolution. The United States is falling dangerously behind other nations in developing its future workforce of scientists, engineers and technology experts. A recent New Hampshire publication states “that 75 percent of New Hampshire youth are inadequately prepared in science.” 4-H Youth Development programs teach science and technology through hands-on, experiential learning.

Youth also benefit from participation in well-supervised, high quality out-of-school time experiences, including 4-H groups, camps and afterschool programs. A recent New Hampshire study of state- and federally-funded, academically-focused afterschool programs found that more than half of youth regularly attending these programs improved both academically and behaviorally (Frankel, Streitburger, & Goldman, 2008).

### **UNH Cooperative Extension’s Public Value:**

4-H Youth Development offers a wide variety of afterschool programs that reach a diverse audience in Hillsborough County. A national evaluation (Evaluations Backgrounder) found regular participation in high quality afterschool programs is linked to “reductions in behavior problems among disadvantaged students,” including “significant reductions in aggressive behaviors with peers,” “reductions in misconduct,” and “reduced use of drugs and alcohol.”

### **UNH Cooperative Extension Response:**

Over 3,000 youth participated in 4-H afterschool programs in Hillsborough County. Efforts in Merrimack, Manchester, Hillsboro and Nashua focused on *4-H Gone Wild in the Garden* with the Student Conservation Association (SCA), AmeriCorps and N-PASS (National Partnerships in Afterschool Science).

The NH Common Ground Garden Project, including its youth initiative, the 4-H Green Thumb Team program, expanded its partnership with the Massabesic Audubon Center, constructed 16 new raised beds for youth, completed site work, renewed the focus on educational programming and methods, and increased volunteer involvement from two to 11 volunteers in 2008 who met weekly all year to support the program. The program served over 150 youth per week at the 4-H Teaching Gardens, 15 families (including five homeless families from The Way Home program through its Rooting for Families initiative), eight 4-H families and 25 of their senior “neighbors” at the Hillsborough County Nursing Home (Elders on the Grow Initiative). More than \$50,000 in grants and in-kind services funded these afterschool and out-of-school efforts.

Another project, initially funded through a national CYFAR (Children, Youth and Families At Risk) grant, the Hillsboro Area Afterschool Project provides safe, supervised afterschool activities for 4th-8th graders at the elementary and middle schools. Family Nights encourage family-school involvement. A local coalition generates resources to sustain youth programs, assists with volunteer recruitment and informs the community. Hillsboro’s current afterschool programs were created through a partnership with 21<sup>st</sup> Community Learning Center to address local concerns for the safety and healthy development of the area’s school-age children.

Through a partnership with National 4-H Council, JCPenney Afterschool, and community afterschool programs, the 130 youth attending the Hillsboro-Deering Afterschool Program benefited from 4-H programs and activities. Forty children participated during the 2007-08 school year through a \$17,000 grant. This program requires a partnership between the afterschool program and the county Extension 4-H Youth Development program, and targets children who wouldn’t be able to attend without this support. Another \$15,850 will go towards helping 28 children attend during the 2008-09 school year. With a focus on youth with limited resources and parental involvement, the project gives youth the chance to learn, create, problem solve and experience life skills.

## **How We Make a Difference:**

Through partnerships and grants, Hillsborough County Cooperative Extension's 4-H Youth Development programs brought more than \$400,000 in the past five years to the county, and since the beginning of 2008, over \$200,000 in grant money to support afterschool programs. These resources provided training, support, curriculum and staff to Hillsborough County's afterschool programs, the 4-H Green Thumb Team summer programs, and other 4-H programs.

Youth attending afterschool programs in Hillsboro provided feedback through focus groups and surveys. Thirteen third graders participated in a focus group and half the children felt their grades were helped by participation in the program, half felt they got along better with friends and five firmly stated they liked themselves better.

Twenty-three 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> graders who attend the *KIDS IN GEAR* middle school program completed the youth survey. Data indicates youth believe they “have a safe place to go after school” in the afterschool program. Of the 24 middle-school parents responding to a survey about the afterschool program, 79 percent reported they had signed their child up for the programs because “their child wanted to attend.” Parents believe their child “is showing more confidence in him/herself,” and “is more motivated to learn new things.” They also noted improvement in arguing less about homework. Major increases in ratings are noted for improved school performance and greater conflict resolution skills, and slight increased ratings are seen for taking more responsibility for their actions as youth.

As a result of the support from the community, and the service provided by 4-H Green Thumb Team participants, over 1,000 pounds of produce were donated/produced for the NH Food Bank and participating families.

## **References:**

- *Evaluations Backgrounder: A Summary of Formal Evaluations of Afterschool Programs.*  
<http://afterschoolalliance.org/researchReports.cfm>
- Frankel, S.L., Ph.D.; Streitburger, K.; & Goldman, E. (2008). *Afterschool Learning: A Study of Academically Focused Afterschool Programs in New Hampshire.* Available online at [http://www.plustime.org/pdf/Plus\\_Time\\_Programs.pdf](http://www.plustime.org/pdf/Plus_Time_Programs.pdf)
- *The Positive Development of Youth: the study of positive youth development: report of findings from the first four waves of data collection: 2002-2006.* (2008). Massachusetts: Tufts University. Available online at <http://ase.tufts.edu/iard/documents/4HStudyAnnualReport2008.pdf>

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